

Transit Permits for Plants and Plant Products Set to Expire

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) will begin issuing new agricultural plant and plant product transit permits from its headquarters in Riverdale, MD. All existing transit permits issued by APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program will be granted an extension period expiring on July 18, 2004. On Oct. 1, 2003, APHIS headquarters started issuing these permits, instead of PPQ field offices, for an initial period of six months. This six-month period gave PPQ the time needed to implement its policies and procedures for permit issuance at APHIS headquarters. Previously, PPQ issued transit permits on a port-by-port basis. Because the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is currently at the ports, the transit permit issuance was transferred to APHIS headquarters.

A permit is required in advance for the unloading, landing or other movement of plants and plant products in cargo and baggage through the United States. DHS' Customs and Border Protection-Agricultural Inspection (CBP-AI) program and APHIS carefully monitor the movement of these products while in the United States to ensure they are adequately safeguarded and re-exported in the specified timeframe. Transit permits prescribe all required safeguarding or mitigation measures for the shipment based on a risk analysis. For example, the use of overland transportation for certain prohibited commodities will not be authorized through regions of the United States that are considered high risk or are susceptible to pests.

APHIS issues transit permits in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations Title 7, CFR Part 352. Only agricultural shipments moving as transportation and exportation (TE) cargo or immediate export (IE) cargo will require an APHIS transit permit issued from PPQ headquarters, in addition to any CBP requirements. Most shipments moving under Customs bond as in-transit (IT) cargo and as residue cargo are covered by other authorization mechanisms. Avocado shipments from Mexico moving IT to inland-approved states are an exception and require APHIS transit permits.

A permittee with a valid transit permit, PPQ Form 597, is responsible for:

- Ensuring that cargo handlers, agents, drivers and other entities involved with handling transit shipments are aware of the provisions of the permit authorization and are able to comply with such provisions. Failure to do so may result in revocation of the permit and possible civil penalties.
- Notifying CBP-AI immediately at the port of arrival of any deviation of the permit provisions.
- Providing export documentation (for air, rail and sea modes) that the permitted cargo exited the country. In the case of truck movements, the permittee will maintain copies of import documents verifying that the permitted cargo entered into Canada or Mexico. The permittee will be subject to audits and monitoring.

Carriers of transit material are responsible for:

- Maintaining the integrity of the permitted cargo through the United States. All carriers involved with the transit of permitted cargo must be U.S. Customs bonded, and upon request of PPQ, provide proof of their U.S. Customs bond and Internal Revenue Service number.
- Maintaining the seal on the container.
- Maintaining secure refrigerated areas for temporary storage of transit cargo.
- Maintaining routing as dictated in the provisions of the permit.
- Reporting immediately to CBP-AI any cargo that is off-loaded by mistake or any container, carrying transiting cargo, is broken or needs repair.
- Providing export or import documentation, in the case of importing into Mexico and Canada, to auditors or monitoring personnel.

Brokers handling transit material on behalf of permittees are responsible for:

- Ensuring cargo handlers, agents, drivers and other entities involved with handling transit shipments are aware of the provisions of the permit authorization and are able to comply with such provisions.
- Maintaining a list of all the clients and addresses of such clients involved under the broker's permit.
- Providing export or import documents, in the case of importing into Mexico and Canada, to auditors or monitoring personnel.

Transit permit applications are available on the APHIS Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/permits/>. The permit application form, PPQ Form 586 Application for Permit to Transit Plants and/or Plant Products into or through the United States, can be downloaded from the Web site or be filled out and printed on-line.

Mail or fax the PPQ Form 586 application to:
USDA, APHIS, PPQ
Permit Services
4700 River Road, Unit 136
Riverdale, MD 20737
Toll Free Number: 1-877-770-5990 (Option 8)
Telephone: (301) 734-8758
Fax: (301) 734-0572

Note to stakeholders: Additional information concerning other PPQ permit processes are available on-line or by calling toll free at 1-877-770-5990.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.